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SPAWN®

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8
FEB

DIGITAL
EDITION



McFARIANE
AFTER ME.

image

COMICS PRESENTS:

"IN HEAVEN"



story

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REUBEN RUDE**

and **OLYOPTICS**

Dedicated to:

DON & MAGGIE THOMPSON

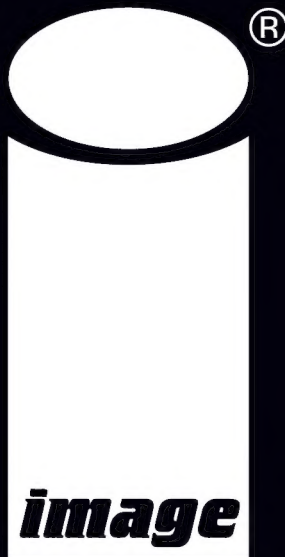
FOR IMAGE COMICS

LARRY MARDER - exec. director TONY LOBITO - publisher


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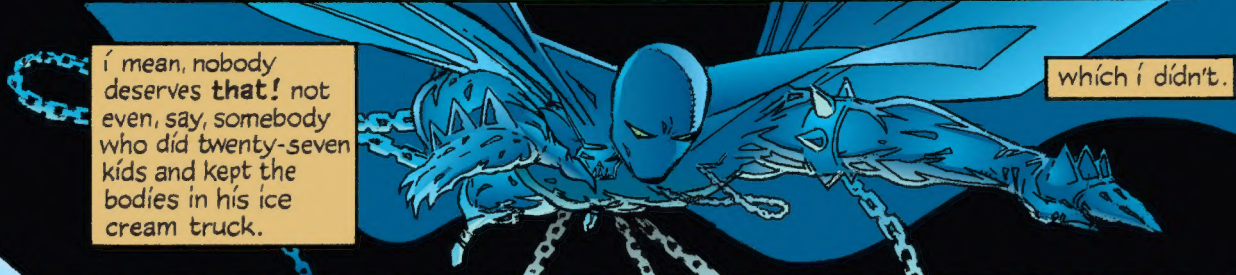
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y'know, seriously, that's gotta be the worst thing ever happened to me, that thing comin' outta the dark.




to be honest, i still don't think i'm completely over it.




i mean, nobody deserves **that!** not even, say, somebody who did twenty-seven kids and kept the bodies in his ice cream truck.

which i didn't.




and even if i did, isn't there a constitutional rights issue here? hmmm?

i mean, jeez, the guy coulda killed me!



it was unreal! i've, like, just finished putting number twenty-eight in the deep freeze, i hear these chains rattlin', okay? i turned around...



there was pain. then it got dark...

...and, frankly, i don't know where the hell i am right now.



i have a problem with this naked stuff, so i kill this sorta four-eyed lizard thing and take its skin for clothing.

actually, thinking about it, this is not so good.

i'm sticky.
i'm buck naked.

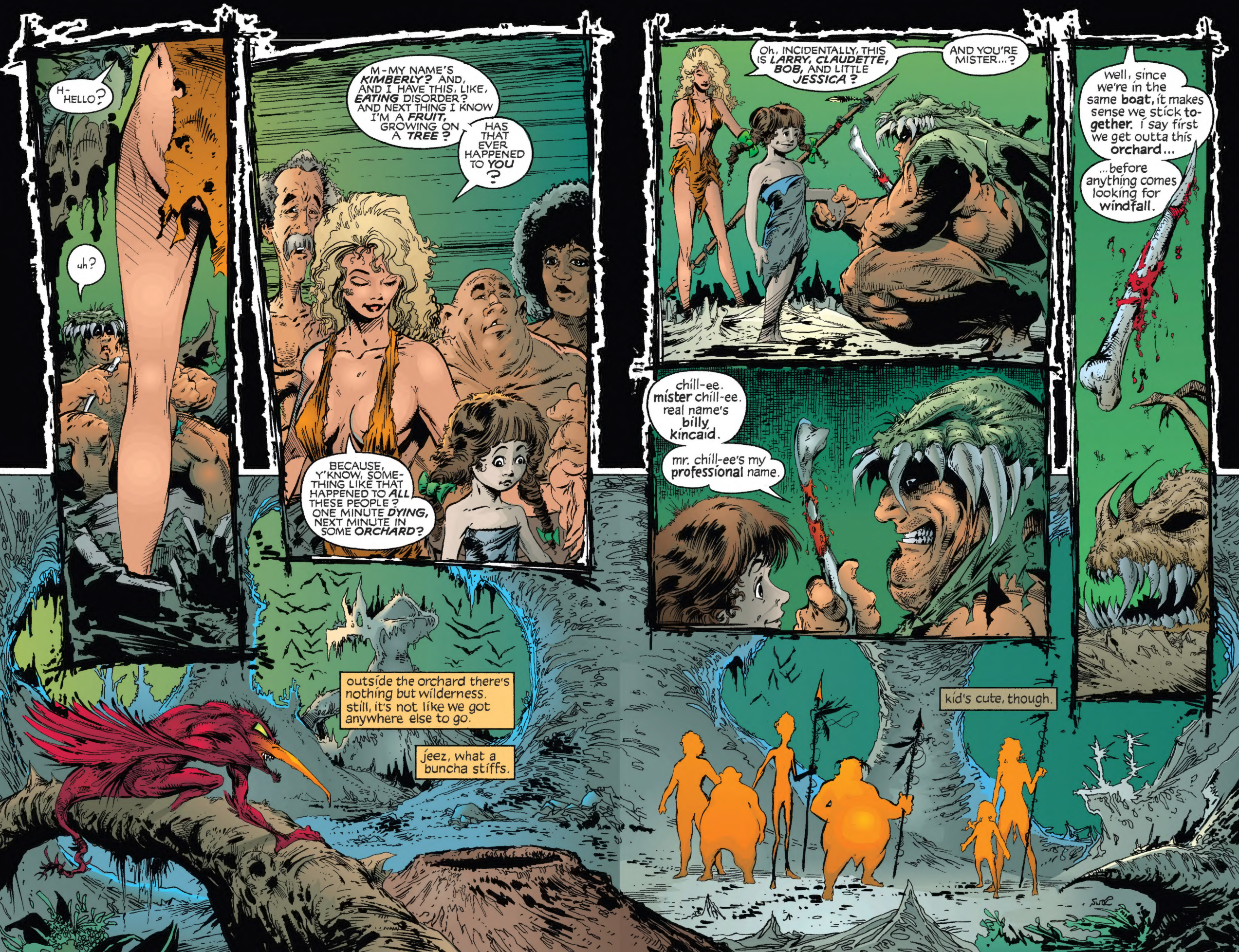
what kind of afterlife is this?

i just noticed i'm not breathing inside this sack of syrup, so i guess i'm dead, and i've gone somewhere religious.

it's nice, knowing you can still kill things when you're dead.

i just wish there were more people around is all.

IN THE HEAVEN
(EVERYTHING IS FINE)



H-HELLO?

uh?

M-MY NAME'S **KIMBERLY**? AND, AND I HAVE THIS, LIKE, **EATING DISORDER**? AND NEXT THING I KNOW I'M A **FRUIT**, GROWING ON A **TREE**?

HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED TO YOU?

BECAUSE, Y'KNOW, SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED TO ALL THESE PEOPLE? ONE MINUTE **DYING**, NEXT MINUTE IN SOME **ORCHARD**?

outside the orchard there's nothing but wilderness. still, it's not like we got anywhere else to go.

jeez, what a buncha stiff.

Oh, incidentally, this is **LARRY**, **CLAUDETTE**, **BOB**, and little **JESSICA**?

AND YOU'RE MISTER...?

chill-ee. mister chill-ee. real name's **billy kincaid**.

mr. chill-ee's my professional name.

well, since we're in the same **boat**, it makes sense we stick together. i say first we get outta this **orchard**...

...before anything comes looking for windfall.

kid's cute, though.



THIS IS JUST SO **WEIRD**, RIGHT, BECAUSE I DO A LOT OF **CHANNELLING**? TALKING TO DEAD PEOPLE? AND NONE OF THEM MENTIONED THIS?

THERE'S **TEN** DEAD-LANDS.

THIS IS JUST THE **LOWEST** SPHERE; THE **RECEPTION AREA**. IF YOU WANT TO GO **HIGHER** YOU'LL HAVE TO CLIMB THE **TOWER**...

OH! Oh, **LORD!** LOOK AT **THIS**, EVERY-BODY!!

LIKE **SPHERES**, ONE INSIDE ANOTHER.

HE'S **COME** FOR ME! I **KNEW** HE WOULD!


I WENT IN FOR MY **GALL BLADDER** OPERATION AN' I WOKE UP GROWIN' IN THAT **ORCHARD** BUT I **KNEW** HE WOULDN'T FORGET ME!



COMFORT-
AND-JOY.
SWEET-AND-LOW.
BRIGHT-AND-
BEAUTIFUL.

WHO-
AMONGST-YOU-
SINGETH-THESE-
SONGS?

I DO,
LORD! WHY,
I SING
'EM ALL THE
TIME!



but dying's worse.

i dream about it
all night long. the
sound of the
chains. the cloak
flapping. spikes.
skulls.

i never want to see
that thing again.

by my reckoning, night lasts about three hours before we get up and move on. the daylight here is kinda funny.

no sun, for one thing.

we ain't set out five minutes when a ray from the sky disintegrates larry, the restaurant-owner and drug-deal fatality from michigan.

HMM. YOU DON'T SEE MANY OF THOSE.

THAT WAS THE **PRIME MONAD** FROM THE HIGHEST SPHERE, THE TENTH. HE HAND-PICKS SOULS TO USE AS **CIRCUITRY** IN HIS **MACRO-COMPUTER**.

i mean, that's gotta hurt, right?

YOUR FRIEND'S **LUCKY**.



there's not enough of lucky larry to bury, so we move on. a way up the trail, fat bob from wisconsin spots somebody he knows...

HEY, LOOK EVERYBODY! IT'S ELVIS!

bob! don't go near it! that isn't the king!

SURE IT IS.


HEY, KING! YA KNOW I WAS LISTENING TO "AN AMERICAN TRILOGY" WHEN I RAN MY PICK-UP UNDER THAT PETERBILT?

bob!!

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR HIM! THAT'S A CTHUGAN METABUSE FROM THE FIFTH SPHERE.

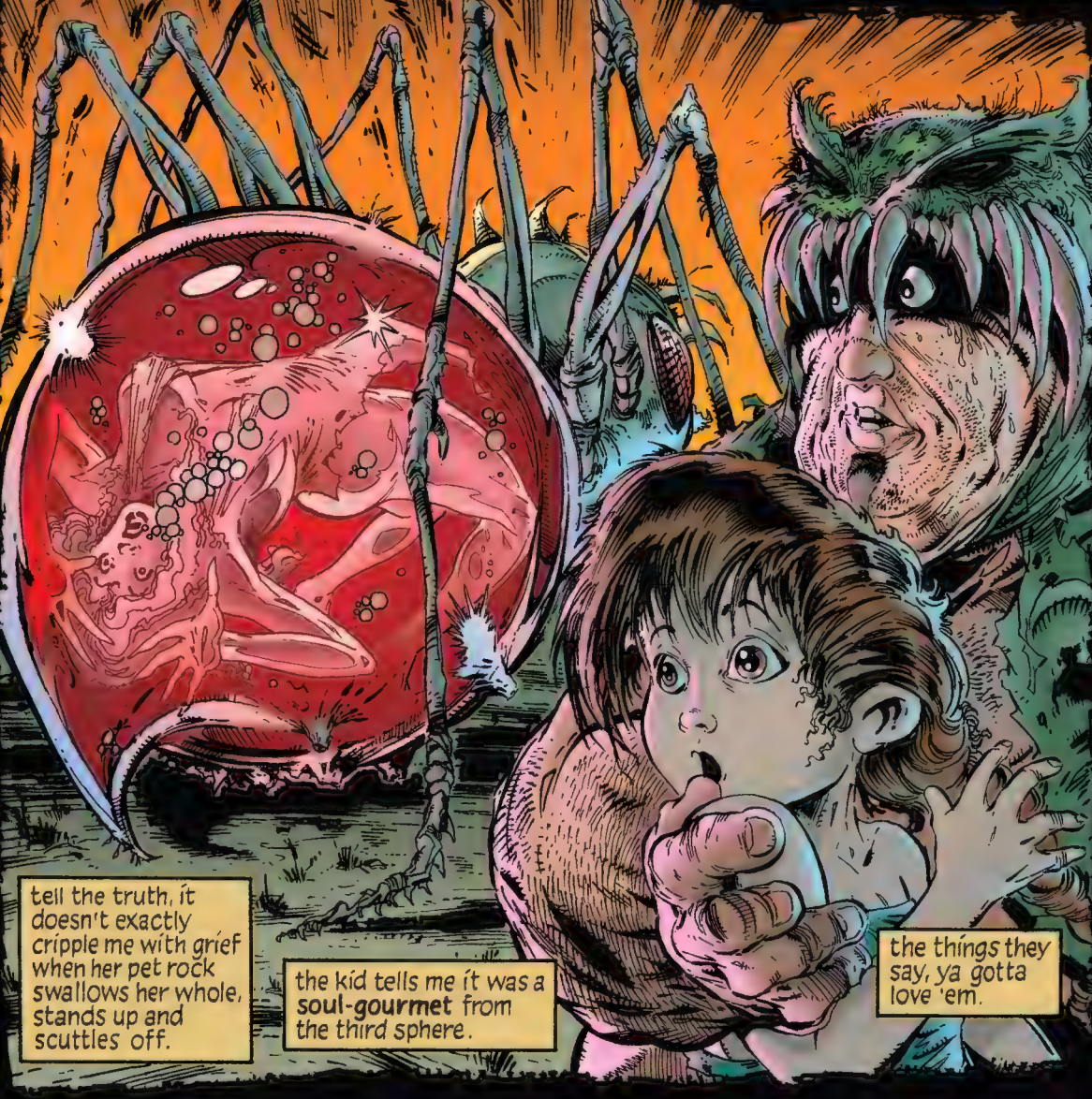
THEY GET AN ADDICTIVE DRUG RUSH FROM THE SOULS OF PEOPLE LIKE BOB!





this is great. three of us left. the kid's a psycho, i'm getting there, and kimberly ends every sentence with a question mark.

OH, YOU SEE THIS, THIS IS JUST LIKE A LUCKY CRYSTAL I HAD?



tell the truth, it doesn't exactly cripple me with grief when her pet rock swallows her whole, stands up and scuttles off.

the kid tells me it was a soul-gourmet from the third sphere.

the things they say, ya gotta love 'em.

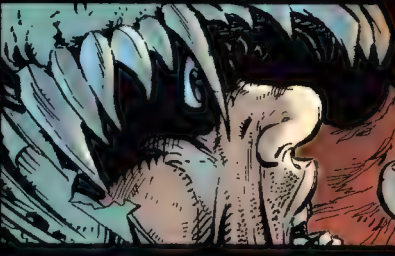
pretty soon after that it gets dark, just all of a sudden how it does around here. the kid finds us a place where we can sleep...



... and
dream.

a flight of bats
surrounds his brow;
his cloak that seethes
like boiling blood and
when the great chains
smash together white
hot sparks shower
down about his feet...

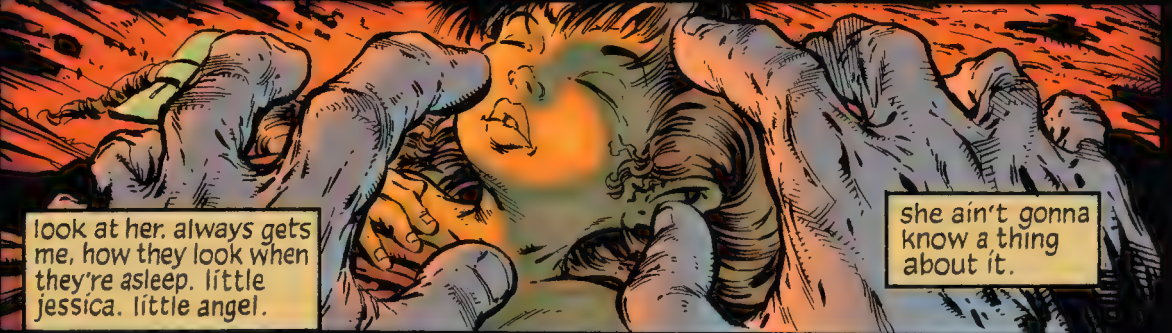
how we died:
is that all us dead
people get to
dream about?



i wake up in a cold sweat, and i know what's gotta be done. the kid's sleeping by the camp fire.

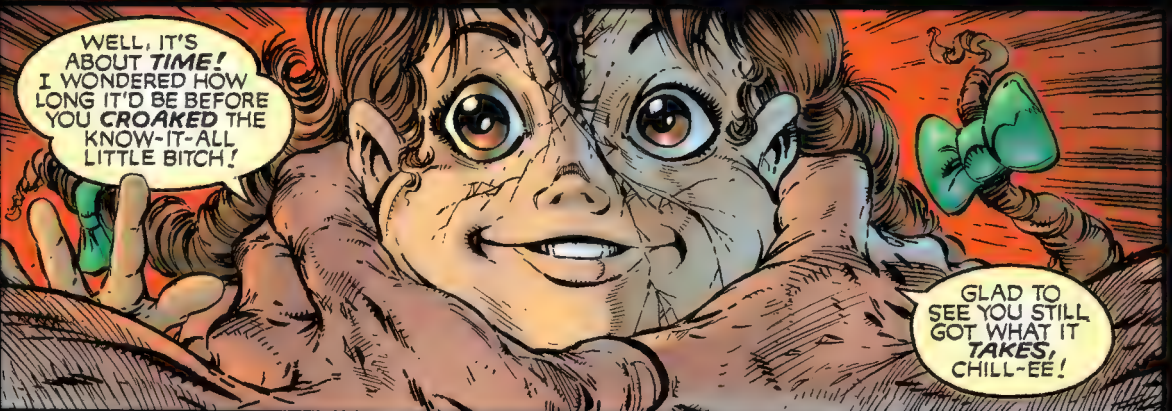


it's the only way. get it out of my system. stop the dreams.



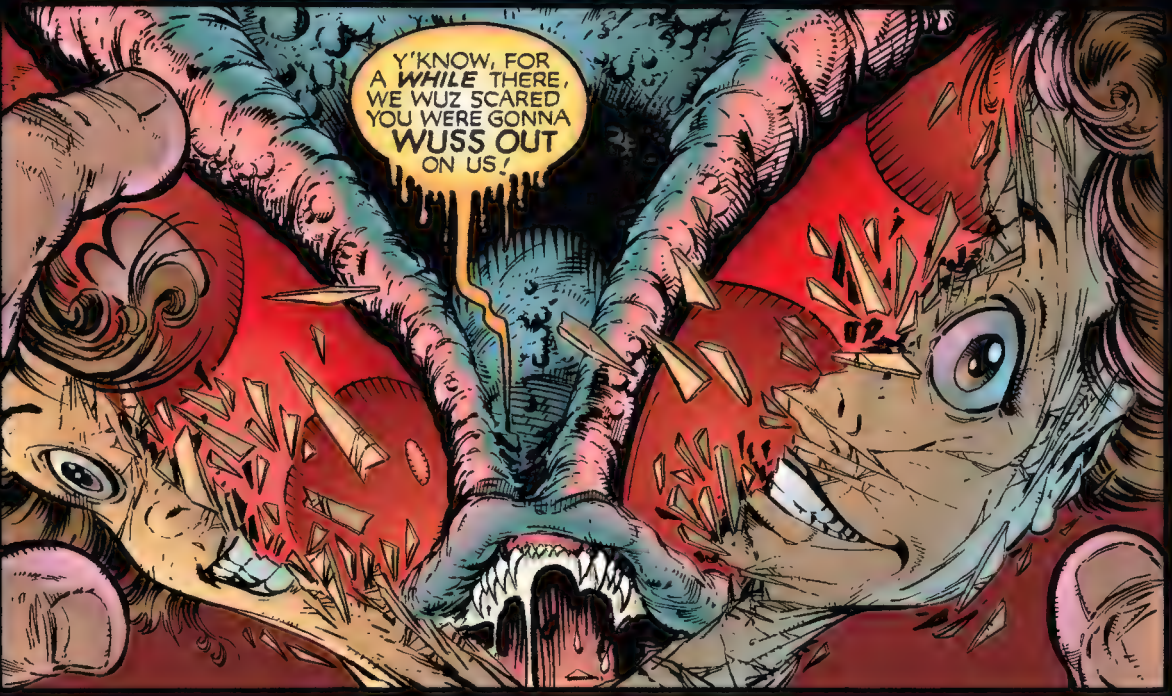
look at her. always gets me, how they look when they're asleep. little jessica. little angel.

she ain't gonna know a thing about it.




WELL, IT'S ABOUT **TIME!** I WONDERED HOW LONG IT'D BE BEFORE YOU **CROAKED** THE KNOW-IT-ALL LITTLE BITCH!

GLAD TO SEE YOU STILL GOT WHAT IT **TAKES**, CHILL-EE!



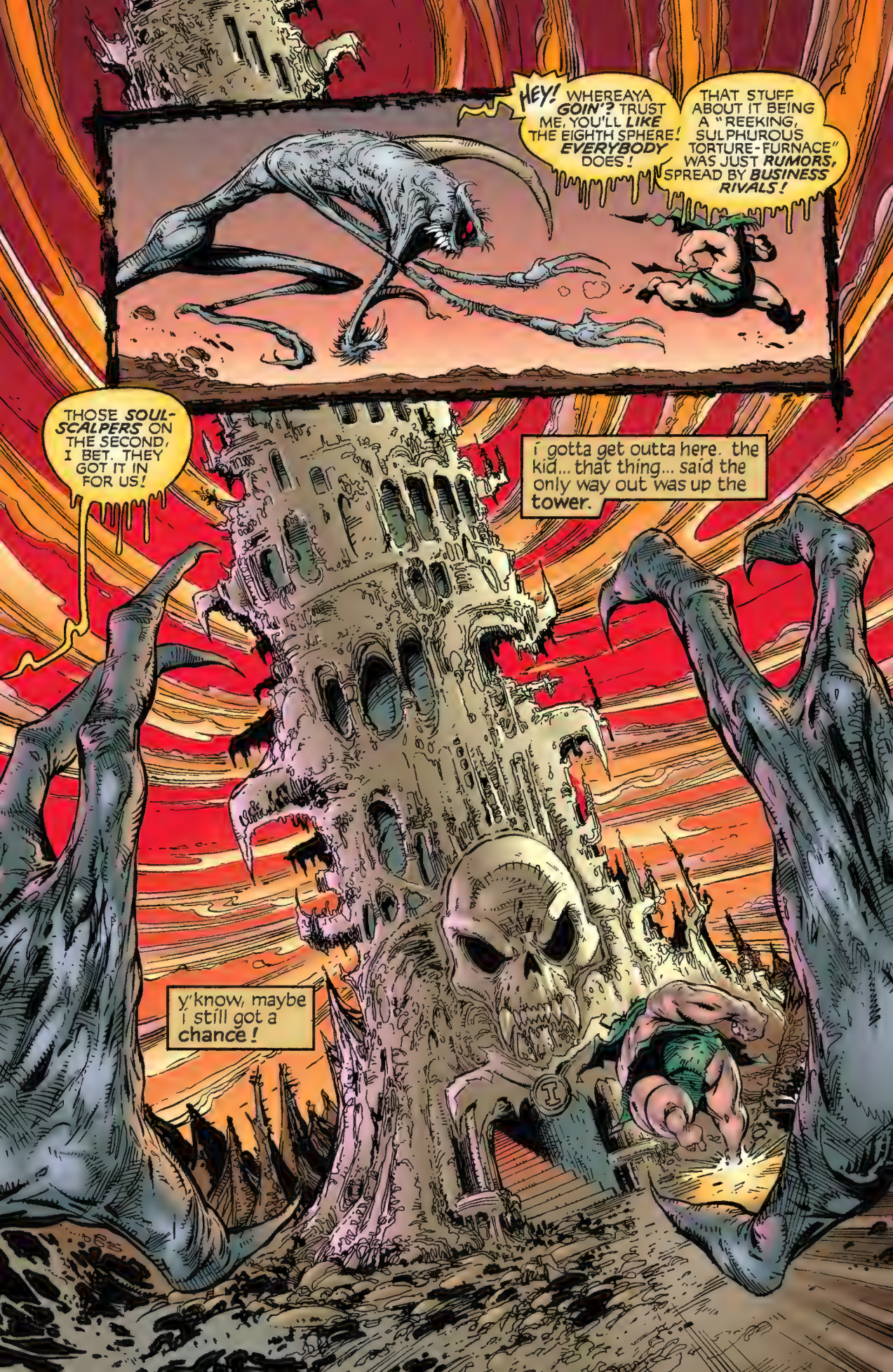
Y'KNOW, FOR A **WHILE** THERE, WE WUZ SCARED YOU WERE GONNA **WUSS OUT** ON US!



GREAT
DISGUISE, huh?
I MEAN, FLIMSY,
BUT CUTE AS
HELL.

I'M **THE
VINDICATOR**,
ONE O' THE
FIVE FAMOUS
**PHLEBIAC
BROTHERS**.
I GUESS YOU
PROBABLY HEARD
O' US.

SORRY 'BOUT
ENTRAPPIN'
YA LIKE THAT. I JUST
HADDA MAKE SURE
YOU WUZ THE KINDA
GUY WE WANTED
UP ON THE **EIGHTH
SPHERE...**



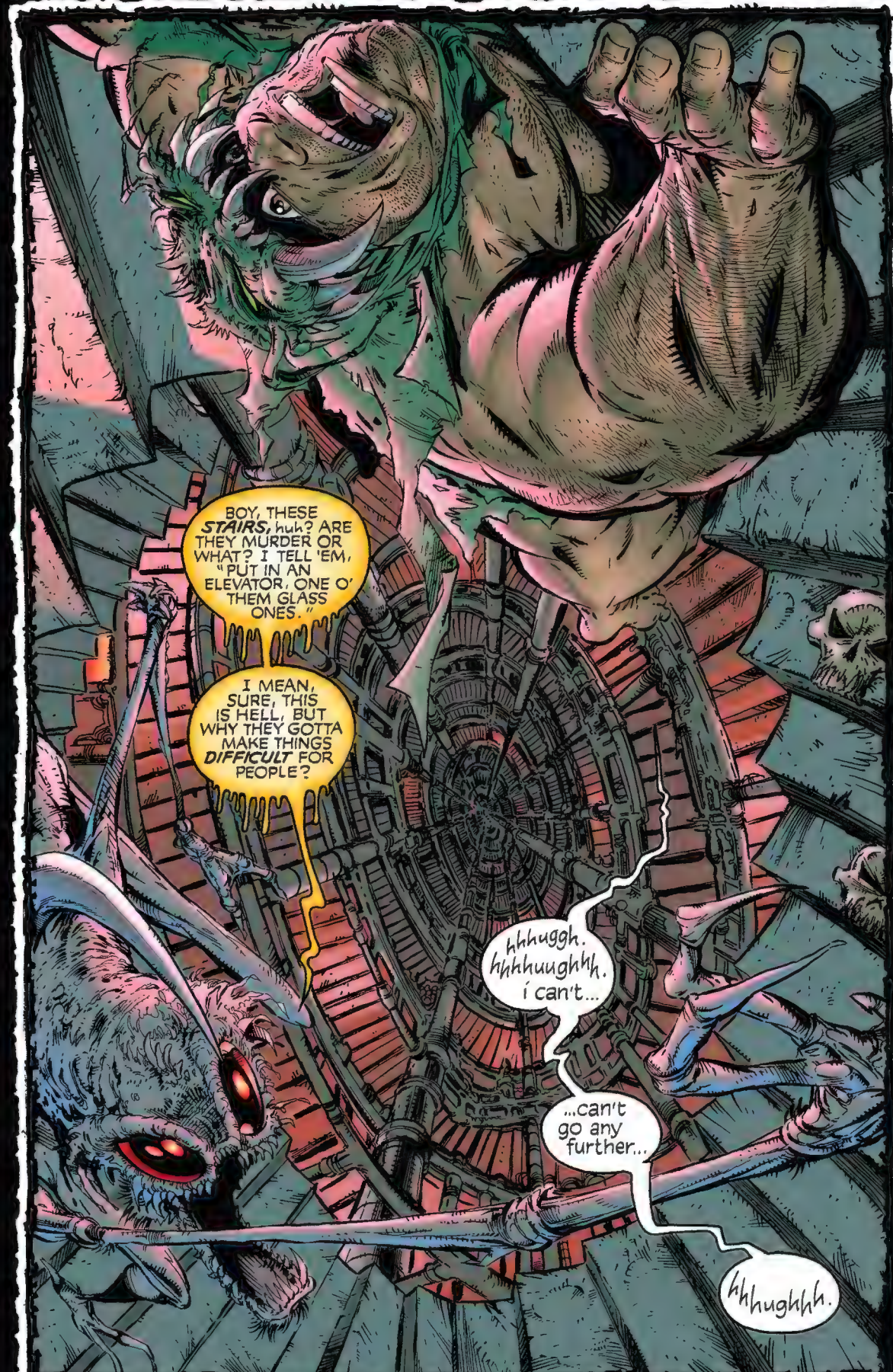
HEY! WHEREAYA GOIN'? TRUST ME, YOU'LL LIKE THE EIGHTH SPHERE! **EVERYBODY DOES!**

THAT STUFF ABOUT IT BEING A "REEKING, SULPHUROUS TORTURE-FURNACE" WAS JUST RUMORS, SPREAD BY BUSINESS RIVALS!

THOSE SOUL-SCALPERS ON THE SECOND, I BET. THEY GOT IT IN FOR US!

i gotta get outta here. the kid... that thing... said the only way out was up the tower.

y'know, maybe i still got a chance!



BOY, THESE
STAIRS, huh? ARE
THEY MURDER OR
WHAT? I TELL 'EM,
"PUT IN AN
ELEVATOR, ONE O'
THEM GLASS
ONES."

I MEAN,
SURE, THIS
IS HELL, BUT
WHY THEY GOTTA
MAKE THINGS
DIFFICULT FOR
PEOPLE?

hhuughh.
hhuughh.
i can't...

...can't
go any
further...

hhuughh.

HEY! NO PROBLEMO!

YOU WANNA BE A FUR COAT FOR SOME HYPER-INTELLIGENT ICE-SHRIMP ON THE SECOND SPHERE?

I MEAN, JUST SAY! I CAN DROP YOU RIGHT OFF!

II

OR WHAT ABOUT THE THIRD SPHERE? HONEST, I'D UNDERSTAND.

GETTING FILLETED AND SERVED WITH A LIGHT PASTRY IS WHAT SOME GUYS LIKE, I KNOW THAT.

III

I WAS GONNA CARRY YA IF YA HADN'T RUN OFF LIKE THAT!

YOU OUGHTTA THINK YOURSELF LUCKY YOU BIN HARVESTED BY THE EIGHTH. I MEAN, A DEAD GUY LIKE YOU, WHAT ARE HIS OPTIONS?

BUT Y'SEE, YOU, YOU'RE SPECIAL. YOU'RE A DEAD CHILD MURDERER, AND WE APPRECIATE THAT IN A GUY.

IV

I MEAN, HERE ON THE FOURTH YOU'D BE A FUEL-ROD!

I SEEN YOU IN ACTION,
MR. CHILL-EE, AN' I GOTTA
SAY YOU'RE TOO GOOD
FOR THAT!

NOW THIS,
THIS PLACE YOU'RE
GONNA LIKE! SOME
CALL IT THE
EIGHTH SPHERE,
SOME CALL IT THE
MALEBOLGE,
BUT ME...

NO WAY ARE YOU
GONNA END UP AS NOSE
CANDY FOR SOME FIFTH-
SPHERE HIPPI
META-SQUID...

...OR SINGING
GOSPEL
FAVORITES IN
AN ELECTRIFIED
BIRD-CAGE
HERE ON THE
SIXTH.

CULTURE
AIN'T FOR US. WE'RE
MORE STRANGLE-'EM-
AN-'STICK-'EM-IN-THE-
FREEZER KINDA
GUYS.

AS FOR THE
SEVENTH
SPHERE, DON'T
ASK. IT'S THIS
PLACE CALLED
EREBUS, BUT
NOBODY'S
EVER SEEN
INSIDE.

WE FIGURE IT'S
SOME SPECIAL HELL
FOR THE MOST DAMNABLE
CREATURES OF ALL.

I CALL IT
HOMEL!

NOW, AS IT HAPPENS, THE **MALEBOLGIA** HIMSELF IS LOOKING FOR SOULS TO JOIN HIS **ARMY**. SOULS JUST LIKE YOU.

WAA
WHAT'S UP?

this place is hot! it's burning my feet!

OK, THAT WON'T BOTHER YOU ONCE YOU'RE FITTED OUT IN YOUR **SLAVE'S WEAR**. ALL THE **MALEBOLGIA'S** CONQUESTS WEAR IT.

HERE, I'LL WHISTLE YOURS UP...

PHWEEEEET!

LEMME INTRODUCE **K3-MYRLU**. SHE'S A CONSTANTLY-EVOLVING **NEURAL PARASITE** AND I THINK SHE **LIKES YOU**.

no!
no, not that!


OH, COME ON!

WTF, LOOK, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING: "NEURAL PARASITES! THEY'RE ONLY AFTER ONE THING!" BUT JUST GIVE IT A CHANCE IS WHAT I'M SAYIN'.

BELIEVE ME, I HAVE A FEELIN' YOU GUYS ARE GONNA BE VERY CLOSE.

EEI! AAAGH!!





AW, LOOK! **Bonding!**
SHE'S
I TELLYA, WHEN A GAL
LIKE K3-MYRLU BONDS
WITH YA, YA GOTTA
REMEMBER TWO
THINGS...

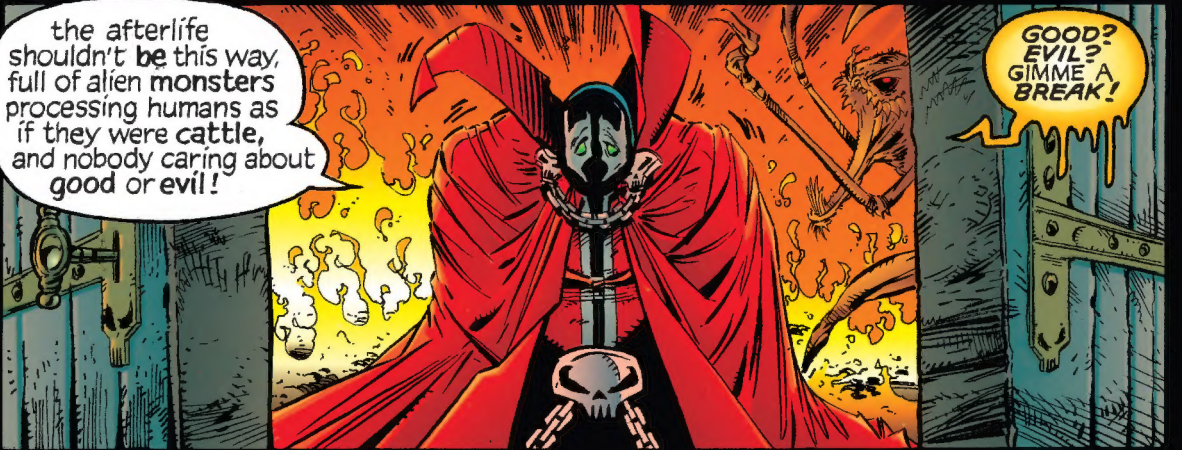
FIRST,
IT'S FOR
LIFE.

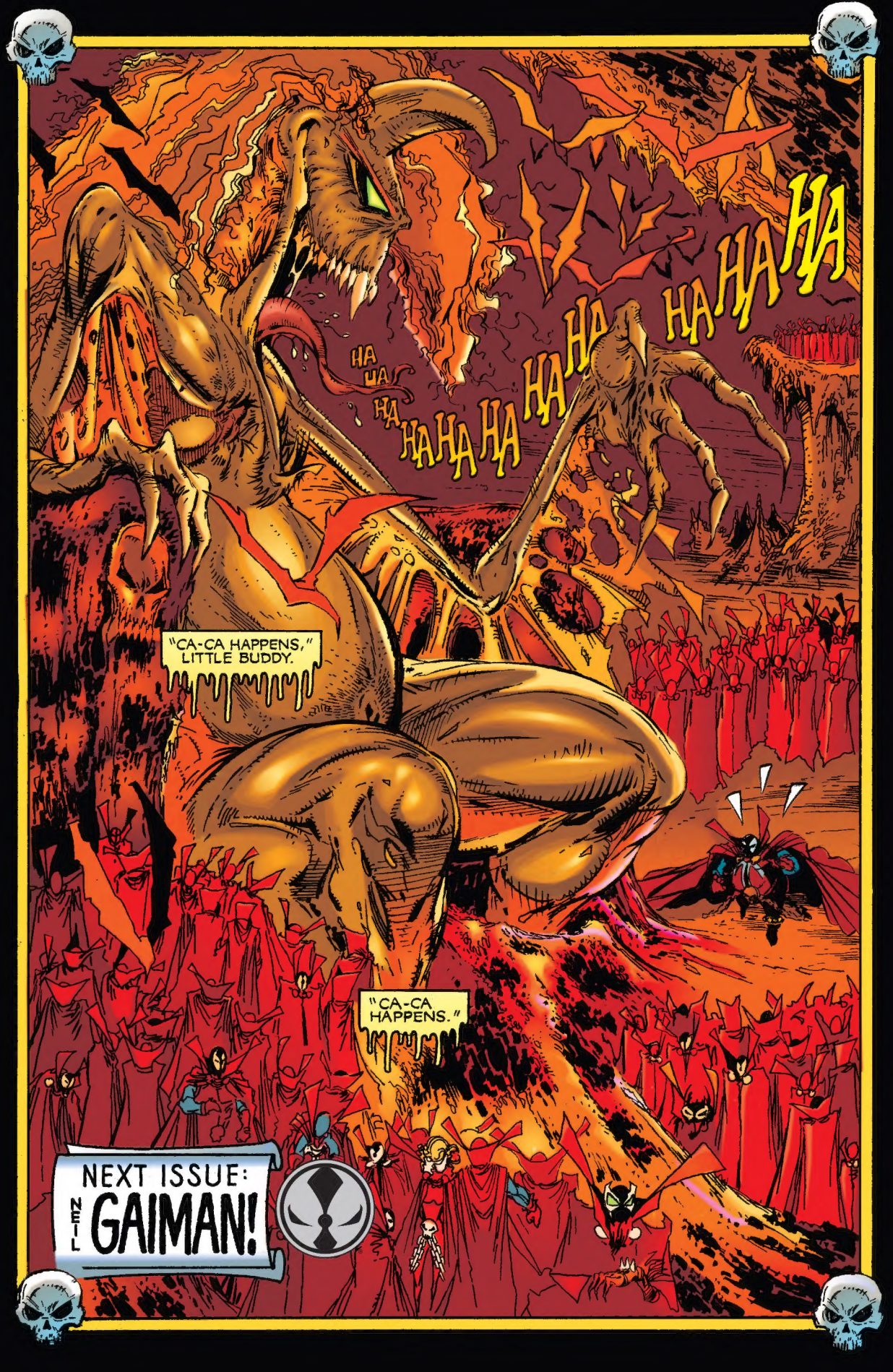
SECOND,
IT'S WITH YOUR
CENTRAL
NERVOUS
SYSTEM.

WOW!
WILLYA LOOK
AT THAT SALIVA
JUST DRIPPING
OFF HER EXO-
FANGS? SHE
REALLY LIKES
YOU, I CAN
TELL.

THERE!
I TELLYA,
YOU AIN'T GONNA
GET A NEAT
DESIGNER UNIFORM
LIKE *THAT* WORKIN'
IN NO FAST FOOD
FRANCHISE!

FIFTY YEARS
BACK WE GOT A
LOT O' THEM
FASHION-PLATE
NAZIS UP HERE,
AN' THEY RAVED
ABOUT IT!





"CA-CA HAPPENS,"
LITTLE BUDDY.

"CA-CA
HAPPENS."

NEXT ISSUE:
L-**GAIMAN!**





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE